

Old Fort Randall Church  
Right Bank, Missouri River  
Pickstown vicinity  
Gregory County  
South Dakota

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Old Fort Randall Church  
Gregory County, South Dakota

S.D. 4  
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Historical and Descriptive Data and Photographs  
to accompany  
Measured Drawings of Old Fort Randall Church  
for  
Historic American Building Survey

Survey No. SD-4

Work accomplished by  
Omaha District Office, Corps of Engineers  
in cooperation with the  
Missouri River Basin Recreation Survey  
of the  
National Park Service  
January 1949

Old Fort Randall Church

Gregory County, South Dakota

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The only visible remains of historic Old Fort Randall, located in NW-1/4, Sec. 17, T95N, R65W, Gregory County, South Dakota, is the ruins of an old church which is the subject of this report. These ruins are on the right bank of the Missouri River, immediately downstream from a large earthfill dam now under construction by the Corps of Engineers as a part of a comprehensive plan for development of the Missouri River Basin. A perspective view of the dam, appropriately named "Fort Randall", showing the location of the church ruins, is furnished on page 11. The historical value of the church ruins has been recognized and they will be preserved for the enjoyment of the many thousands of tourists who are expected to visit the project annually.

The site of the Fort was selected in 1856 by General William S. Harney, Commander of the Sioux Expedition, after spending a winter at Old Fort Pierre. He suggested that the new post be named after Colonel Daniel Randall, "late Deputy Paymaster-General". On 26 June 1856, the post was laid out and construction began. The exact location of the original Fort is not definitely known for according to the Surgeon General's Report for 1875 (Circular No. 8), it was for the most part torn down, and a new post was built during 1870-72, under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel E. S. Otis, Twenty-second Infantry.

Fort Randall was, in its day, an important military post. In addition to providing military protection to settlements up and

down the river, it was a focal point for receipt and distribution of supplies. The Fort played a key role in hostilities following the Minnesota Sioux uprising in the early 1860's, in the Black Hills gold rush of the 1870's and in the Dakota land boom of the 1880's. Many Indian fighters, merchants, and adventurers whose names are legendary lived at the Fort at one time or another or made it their headquarters.

Fort Randall was at one time one of the finest of the government military stations. It had officers' residences and barracks ample to house a garrison of 800 men. The parade grounds were said to be the finest of any. It was bordered by rows of trees, planted in early days, which in later years attained a large size. (From news clipping of 1896).

Little is known of the social activity of the garrison for the first twenty years after the building of Fort Randall. In 1875 soldiers of the Fort conceived the idea of building a church. Funds were solicited from the surrounding country and competent carpenters were selected from among the troops. Native material was generally used in the construction. Rock was gathered from the neighboring fields for the basement, foundation, and as fill for the massive walls. Chalk-rock was quarried from the nearby bluffs and used as a veneer for the entire building. Cottonwood for rafters and sheathing was cut locally and presumably sawed in a sawmill located on the reservation. Much white pine was used for shingles and trim, and red pine was used for the trusses and heavier members. (See pages 9 and 10 on identity of wood samples.) Lodge No. 2 of the I.O.O.F. was also organized at the Fort about this time.

Their members received unofficial assistance from the Quartermaster Department in the quarrying and transportation of the chalkstone blocks used in the construction.

The accompanying print, page 12, from the archives of the Office, Chief of Engineers, is the nearest thing to an authentic original plan of the church available. This plan was not closely adhered to, apparently because the construction of the church became a community venture rather than an official project, and it was decided to make the building more of a social center and incorporate a room for lodge meetings. It is interesting to note that the dimensions of the library and the church proper of the original plan conform very closely to the measurements taken of the building in July 1947.

Numerous contemporary descriptions reveal the interior of the church as a thing of beauty. The pews and other fixtures were of highly polished black walnut. According to an interview in 1947 with Mr. Charles F. Pratt of Fairfax, South Dakota, a resident of Gregory County since 1885, an organ was also secured and was located in the balcony. Very little information is available on the heating system that was used, though it generally is agreed wood was used as fuel.

Fort Randall was officially abandoned in 1892 (A.G.O. Files), though it was but a skeleton post after 22 July 1884, when the adjoining military reservation was relinquished. The Government buildings were later sold at public auction, but not the church. Private sales disposed of the fine church furnishings. Some of the black walnut was made into house furniture; several pews went

in the making of a pulpit for the Congregational Church at Fairfax, South Dakota. (See photograph on page 56.) One pew survives as an exhibit in the museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society at Pierre. The marble plate which was over the door of the Lodge Room is also in the museum. The church bell is believed to be at either Wagner or Springfield, South Dakota.

About 1896 a small cyclone struck the building and tore off approximately half of the roof over the chapel proper. Later a second cyclone struck and the south portion of the lodge roof disappeared. Since then the church has suffered greatly at the merciless hands of vandals and nature, and the photographs well attest to its present precarious condition.

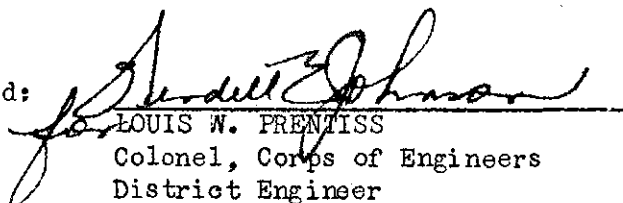
Much of the research data for this report has been supplied by Mr. Merrill J. Mattes, Historian for Region Two, National Park Service, Department of the Interior. "Denny Moran's Reminiscences" from the South Dakota Historical Collections, Vol. XXIII (1947) was also extensively used.

This narrative report with photographs has been assembled by the Omaha District Office, Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with the Missouri River Basin Recreation Survey of the National Park Service.



Henry E. Anderson  
Engineer (Architect)

Approved:



LOUIS W. PRENTISS  
Colonel, Corps of Engineers  
District Engineer

Old Fort Randall Church  
Gregory County, South Dakota

DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Custodian

Omaha District  
Corps of Engineers  
U. S. Army

Date of Erection

Erected in 1875

Builder

Volunteer labor by soldiers of the First United States Infantry, who named it Christ's Church.

Present Condition

The stone foundation is in fair condition, though badly weathered, and mortar has fallen from some of the joints. The walls are all standing except the north and south walls of the center portion, identified as the Lodge Room on the plans. The finish stone on the exterior walls is approximately fifty percent missing.

Interior plaster is badly cracked and fallen out in many places. Roof is missing except a little remaining over the Lodge Room. No windows or doors remain, though some badly weathered frames, sill and sash remain. Floor in entire building is missing. The basement is caved in but an outline of the basement walls is visible.

Number of Stories

One story with small partial basement and bell tower.

Material of Construction

The foundation and basement walls are boulders, laid up with lime mortar. The east, west and interior walls are 3'-0" thick. The south and north walls are 2'-0" thick. All exterior faces are of 4"

thick pink chalk rock veneer, set in lime mortar, over filled back-up wall. The chalk rock was quarried at the site. Entire interior finish is lime plaster, over stone or wood lath. Where applied to wood the wood is roughened to hold the plaster. No evidence remains that paint was used in the building. However, an outline of painted murals on east and west walls of the Lodge Room can be seen.

Common red clay brick approximately  $3\text{'-}7/8"$  x  $7\text{'-}3/4"$  x  $2\text{'-}1/4"$  in size, were used in both chimneys.

Rafters and sheathing are cottonwood. The  $4"$  x  $10"$  trusses are red pine. Sheathing was spaced about  $4"$  apart and covered with heavy building paper and white pine shingles. All window and door trim, casings, etc., and spiral stairway members are white pine.

A  $3\text{'-}0"$  diameter circular window was above the entrance door at the east end of the chapel. This opening is spanned with  $6"$  x  $8"$  white pine lintel. The east wall is  $3\text{'-}0"$  thick and the circular jamb was of plaster on white pine lath. The circular window in the west wall of the reading room was  $20"$  in diameter and of similar construction.

It was impossible to tell from the present condition of the basement what type of heating equipment had been used. Through interviews with some of the older natives it seems a wood-burning heating stove protruded somehow from the basement to the chapel proper. The remainder of the basement was probably used for wood storage.

An early photograph of the church, page 8, shows what is either a statue niche or circular window above the entrance to the lodge in the north wall. However, a niche was shown on the conjectural elevations and the perspective before the copy of this photograph was obtained.



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UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Lincoln, Nebraska  
September 23, 1947

Mr. Wendell E. Johnson, Chief  
Engineering Division  
Office of the District Engineer  
1709 Jackson Street  
Omaha 2, Nebraska

Dear Mr. Johnson:

I was very glad indeed to have the opportunity of identifying the wood samples that were taken from the old Fort Randall chapel. As one would expect, the majority of the wood was apparently delivered to Fort Randall by boat and consisted almost altogether of white pine (*Pinus strobus*). Only one piece, No. 19, a 4 x 10 truss, was of red pine (*Pinus resinosa*). This pretty well identifies the shipment as coming from southern Minnesota or Wisconsin. There were two pieces of cottonwood, I presume cut locally with the sawmill that I understand was at the Fort. These are pieces No. 9 and No. 16. No. 9 is a rafter and No. 16, sheathing. I would have expected sample No. 14, a shingle, to have been eastern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*). On the other hand, white pine was commonly used for shingles in 1872, and incidentally would be used at the present time were it not for the high price.

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If I can be of any further assistance to you, kindly let me know.

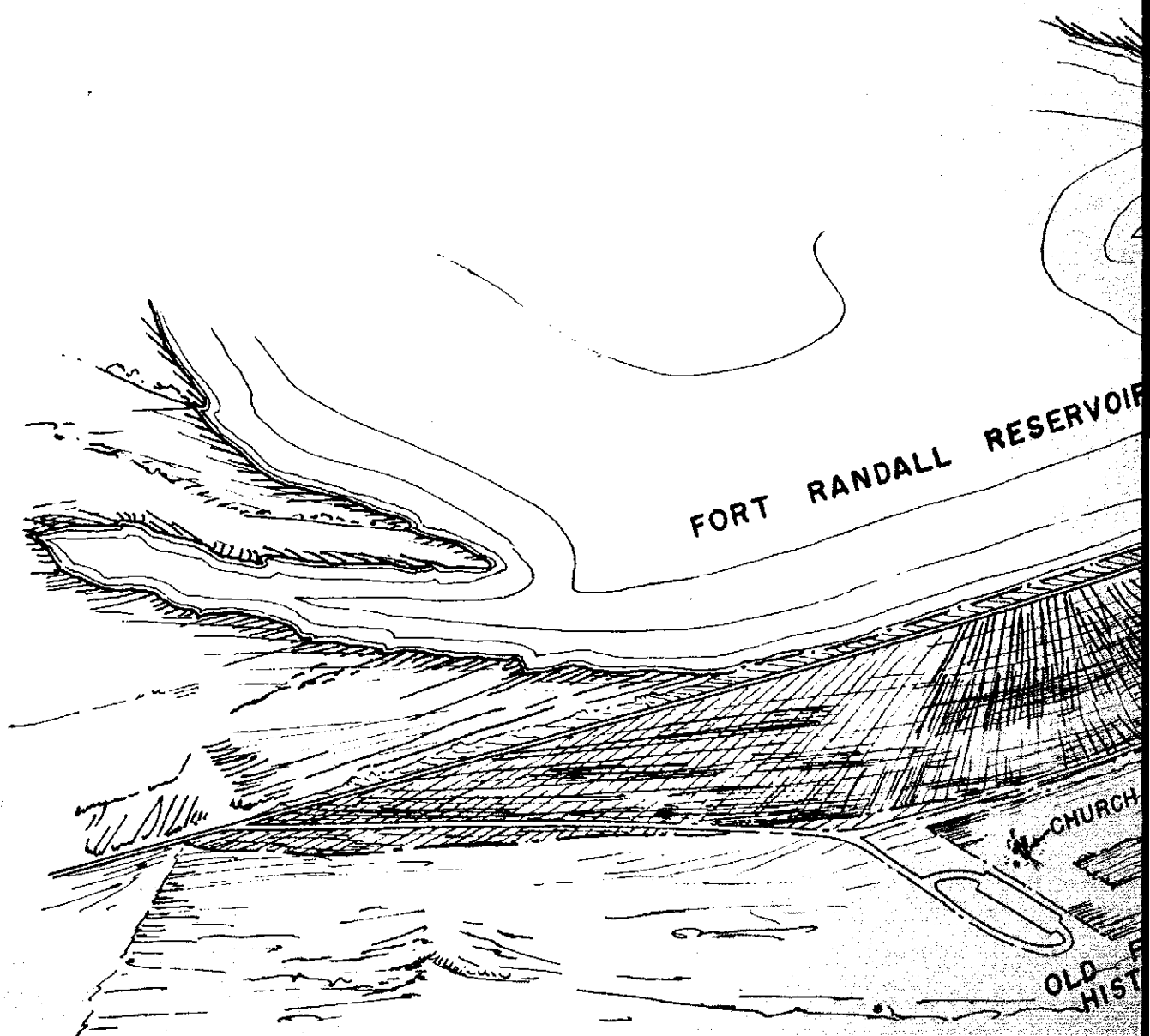
Very sincerely,

/s/ Ross A. Williams  
Ross A. Williams, Chief  
Regional Forestry Division

Old Fort Randall Church  
Gregory County, South Dakota  
Wood Specimens from Chapel

- |        |     |   |
|--------|-----|---|
| W.P.   | 1.  | Pulley support from Chapel Room                     |
| W.P.   | 2.  | Horizontal trim over Chapel entrance                |
| W.P.   | 3.  | 1 x 6 at truss                                      |
| W.P.   | 4.  | Window and door trim                                |
| W.P.   | 5.  | Window sill   |
| W.P.   | 6.  | Window mullion                                      |
| W.P.   | 7.  | Window jamb   |
| W.P.   | 8.  | Wood over Confessional Doorway                      |
| C.Wood | 9.  | Rafter  |
| W.P.   | 10. | Interior window casing from Reading Room            |
| W.P.   | 11. | Window Stop   |
| W.P.   | 12. | Outer trim, Reading Room window, interior elevation |
| W.P.   | 13. | Vertical support from spiral stairway               |
| W.P.   | 14. | Shingle   |
| W.P.   | 15. | Base board from Confessional                        |
| C.Wood | 16. | Sheathing   |
| W.P.   | 17. | Window mullion                                      |
| W.P.   | 18. | Inner trim, reading Room window, interior elevation |
| R.Pine | 19. | 4 x 10 truss  |

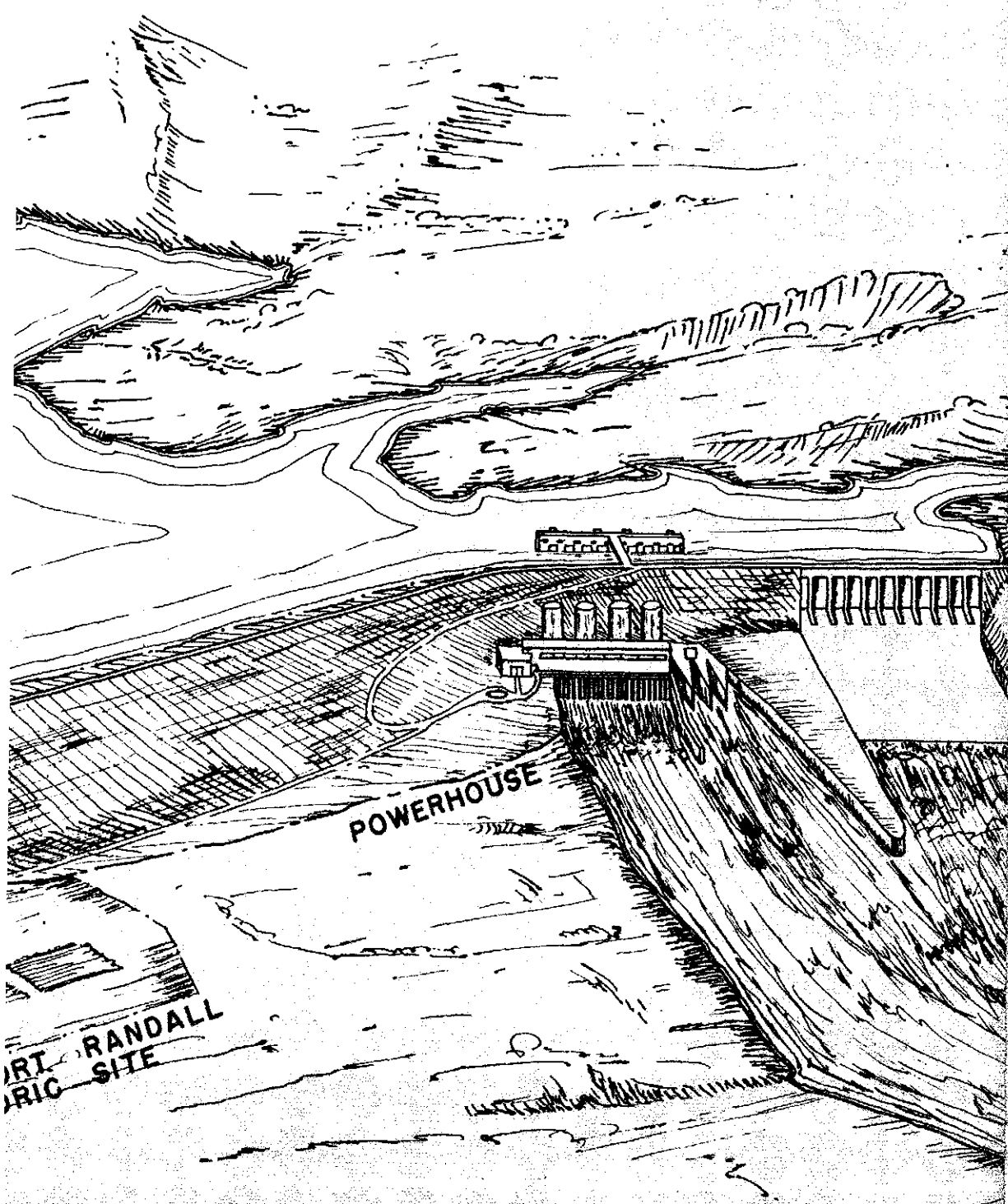
Chapel built in 1875 - by Volunteer Soldier labor.



FORT RANDALL RESERVOIR

CHURCH

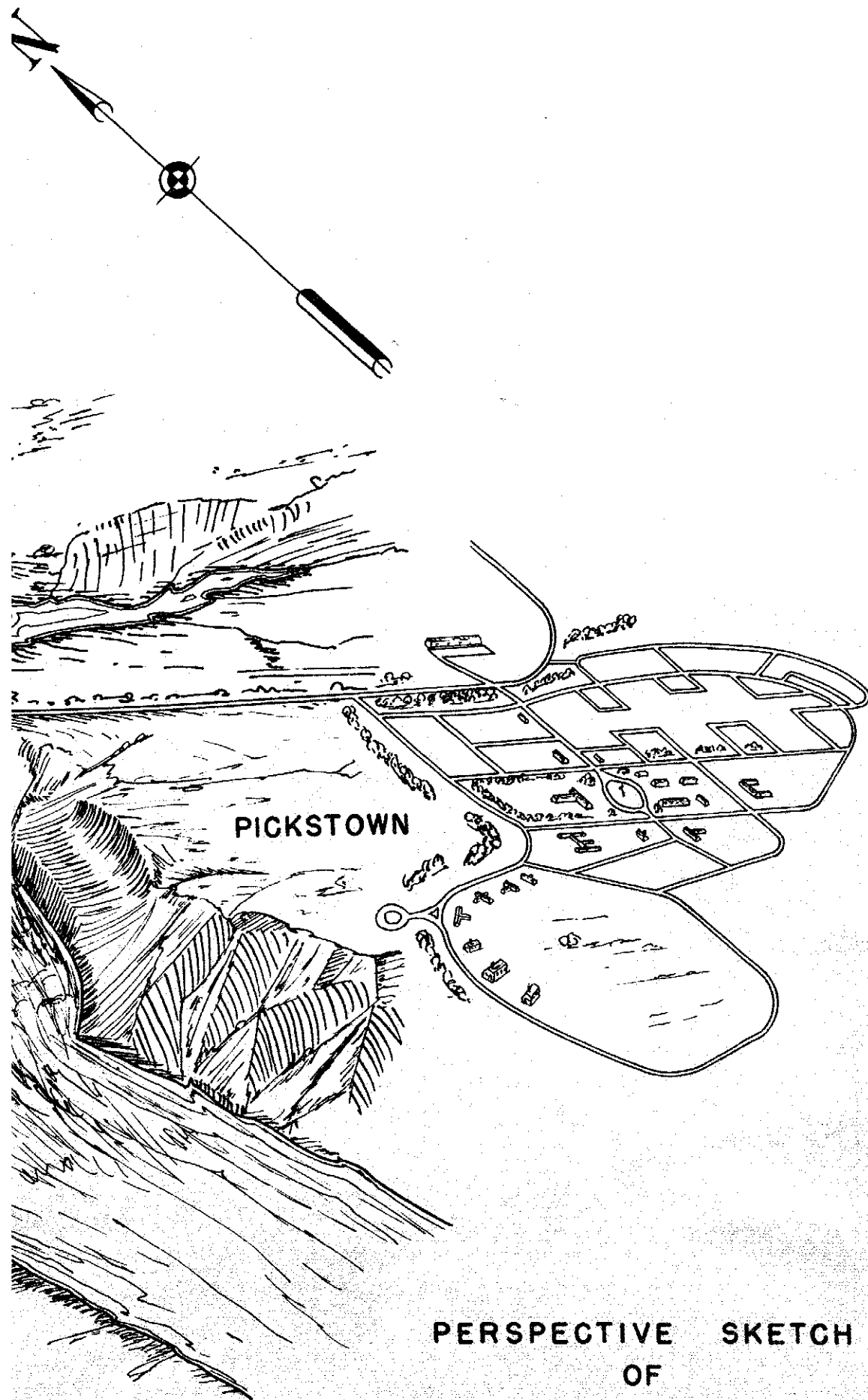
OLD HIST



PORT RANDALL  
RIC SITE

POWERHOUSE

PROPERTY OF  
BUREAU OF REVENUE  
OVERSEAS COLLECTIONS  
F.A.D.



PERSPECTIVE SKETCH  
OF  
FORT RANDALL DAM

# Proposed Chapel at Fort Randall D. C.

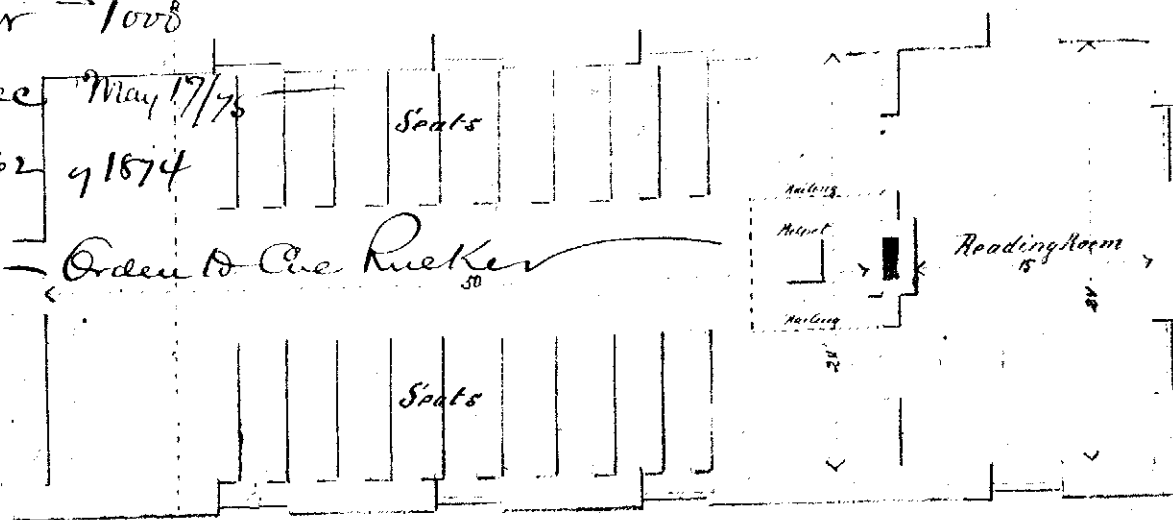
Maintenance - Stone -  
Trough to do the Labor -

Per cost \$1000

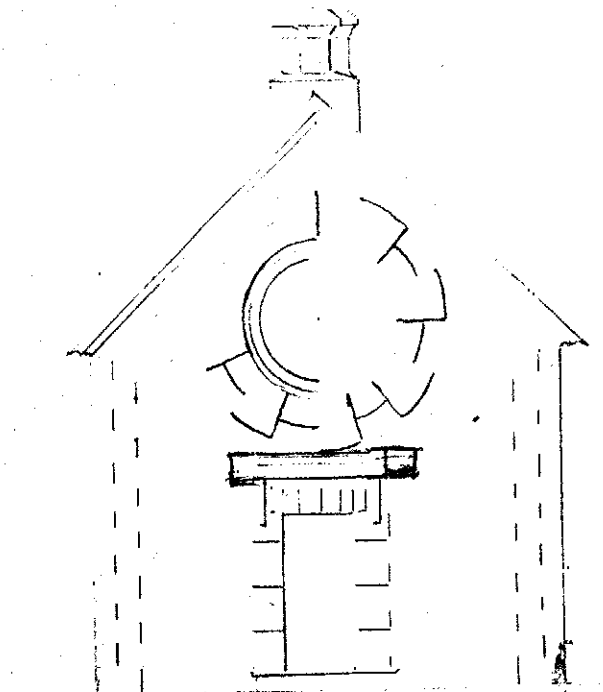
App'd by Sec May 17/75

Sta 4162 of 1874

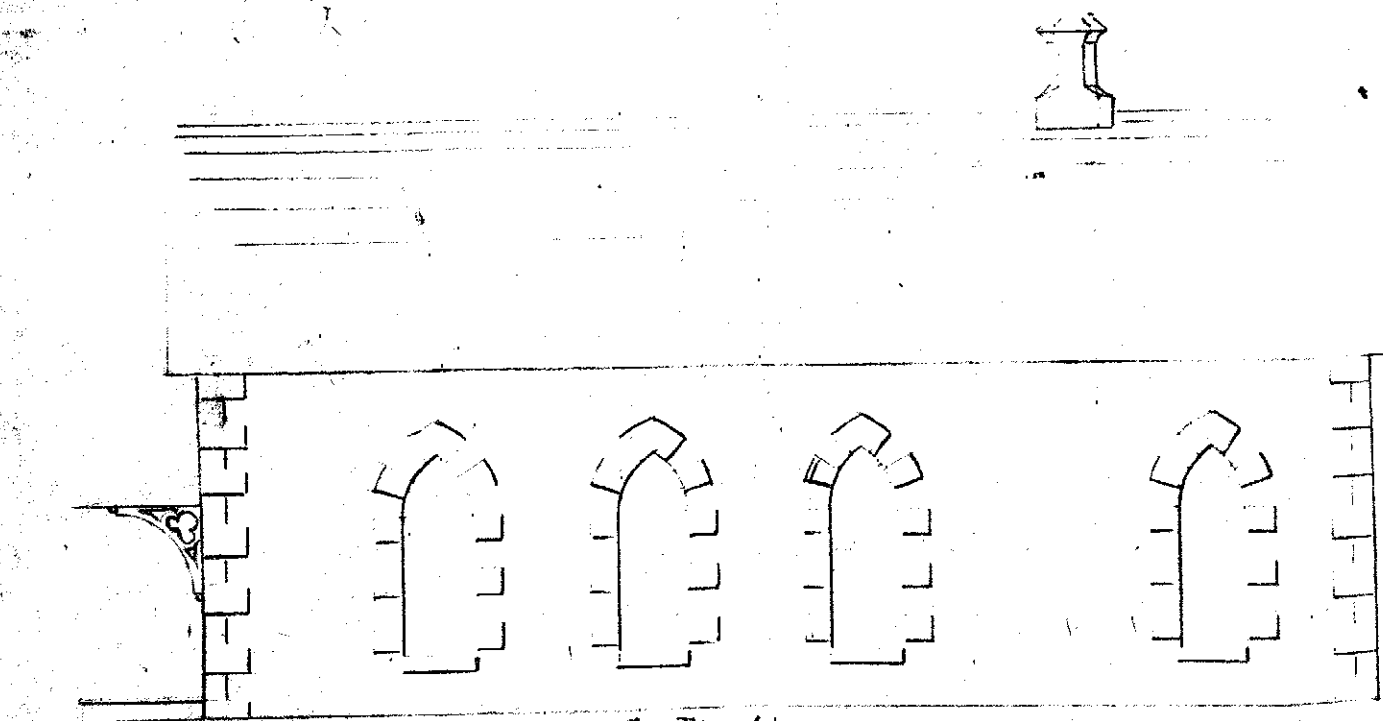
May 22/75 - Order to the Rucker



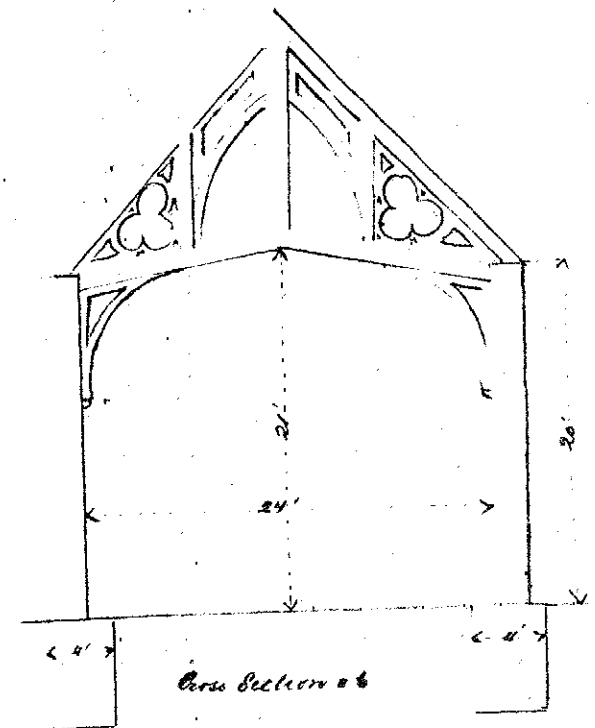
Ground Plan



Front Elevation



Side Elevation



Cross Section

PHOTOSTAT OF ORIGINAL PLAN OF  
OLD FORT RANDALL CHURCH  
SECURED FROM  
OFFICE, CHIEF OF ENGINEERS